

A New West Side Story

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A partnership involving the public, private and nonprofit sectors is dedicated to revitalizing Asbury Park as a whole city: upgrading neighborhoods on the city's West Side to complement the development on the beachfront and in the downtown business district. Spurred by investments from New Jersey Resources and Jersey Central Power & Light, the nonprofit InterFaith Neighbors Inc. can now launch a 10-year revitalization plan.

The state-endorsed overall plan for neighborhoods west of Memorial Drive involves construction of affordable-housing units, building youth recreation facilities and renovating other educational and recreational buildings. New Jersey Resources, the parent of New Jersey Natural Gas, contributed \$500,000 to InterFaith's program. The addition of a \$200,000 donation from JCP&L will enable the group to build seven affordable houses, establish a home for the Police Athletic League's youth boxing program, buy lighting for the city's Little League baseball fields and refurbish the indoor pool at the Boys and Girls Club.

The corporations are taking advantage of the state's Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program that encourages the corporate sector to contribute to designated neighborhoods in exchange for a 100 percent tax credit for every dollar invested. The goal is to "help to bring neighborhoods back," Charles A. Richman, acting community affairs commissioner, said when JCP&L's participation was announced last week.

The focus on neighborhoods was not lost on Hazel Samuels, the city's director of community development. "You can build all the fancy condos on the beachfront you want, but for us to be a truly healthy, revitalized city, we've got to involve our neighborhoods," Samuels said. That includes places to live and places for the city's children — its future — to play and grow. The partnership developing in Asbury Park — and the vision its participants bring — can make that happen.